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ABSTRACT

Intended for college teachers and students of Anglo-Saxon literature, this paper provides an overview of the poetic devices available to poets of the fourteenth century. The paper examines how the "Pearl" poet made use of numerical symbolism and the principles of formal logic as structural devices, giving examples of these devices from "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," Chaucer's "Parlement of Foules," and Guillaume de Lorris's "Roman de la Rose." The paper also examines the infusion of color into Middle English poetry, citing descriptions of the Green Knight's clothing and castle as examples. Uses of rhyme, puns, and the alliterative long line are also discussed, focusing on the Harley's "Lyrics" and "Sir Gawain." Finally, the paper explores the various uses of allegory and symbolism, especially the religious symbolism in Bede's "De Dei Judicii" and "Pearl." A bibliography of works on Middle and Old English is included. (SRT)

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Across a Gap in the Long Line

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To the Teacher of Beowulf or of poetry in general at College Level:

Sometimes it is difficult to find material geared to the young student in either of the above fields. The following paper gives the student an overview of the poetic devices available to poets of the 14th century, including a useful bibliography. In conjunction with another article published in ERIC in 1985, the student may see the historical development of the medieval poet's resources for making poetry as well as the influence of the Norman occupation on language, literature, and attitudes from the 10th to the 14th century.

The 1985 article referred to is "A View from the Sea-cliff," by Hope Bussey McKenzie.

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Across a Gap in The Long Line

If the Beowulf poet could have dropped in again on his fellow poets three hundred years or so after he had gone clanking stiff-legged to his final resting place, he would have found his craft and his art only just recognizable. His comfortable, predictable line with its charp caesura and its four stressed syllables in lock-step had been altered by the addition of unstressed syllables until it had become a "vorpal blade" that went "snicker-snack" through thick forests of new techniques. It might have seemed a flimsy, even an effeminate instrument compared with the ecg, sweord, and brond with which he had to carve thoughts into words. There was rhyme, too, and complicated stanza-forms, a swarm of allusions to things of which he had never even suspected the existence; in fact, there were whole bodies of thought and techniques of expression of which he had never dreamed. Most troublesome to him might have been the mind-set of poets who, as men (and women) of their age, could indulge in love stories and puns and a romantic view of nature. The most he had been able to manage were the freoooowebbe and hero-

tales and medu-drēam, with a half-embarrassed glance at the frivolity of the young men flitende on their horses along the fealwe strǣte. There had been scīr-wered and bēagas; and the scop, meanwhile sang hādor on Heorote; but of daylaunce he had never heard. Certainly, it had no place among the bloody doings of his hero and his hero's family, friends, and neighbors. The poet would have been a bit more at home with the heavily theological content of the Pearl poems, for he was probably a Christian; and he was perhaps acquainted with the Aenid and the Old and New Testaments, but since his time, a new world had been created out of French and Latin words and literary forms and attitudes. He had a great deal of time to make up.

To begin at a point far from the Beowulf poet's conscious mental processes, the Pearl poet--to single out one of several 14th century writers in the genre--was enthusiastic in his use of "celestial arithmetic" and "celestial geometry" as a structural device. Of course, there are the usual groupings of the magic number 3. But to the medieval mind, the number 5 was also powerful: it threw open all the possibilities of "round numbers"--those divisible by 5 (Bishop 27). In Gawain, the discussion of Sir Gawain's philosophy, character, and personality is organized into groups of five qualities or virtues, for instance, in the symbol of the Pentangle, which Bishop equates with trawpe,

its five interlocked lines representing the interlocked virtues of "integrity, flawlessness, and perfection" (Bishop 28). In Pearl, there are 20 groups of 5 stanzas (with one deliberate exception); the colloquial expression for a multiplier that will produce infinity (And wolde her corounez worn worþe þe fyue [Pearl 1.451] and Bot vchon enlé we wolde were fyf [Pearl 1.849].[1] Before he leaves the number 5, Bishop attempts to explain why the sixth stanza was introduced into Pearl and Gawain, producing 101 stanzas. He refers to an article by Patricia Margaret Kean in which she sees 6 as a means of drawing attention to each poem's multiples of 12: Pearl's stanzas of twelve lines each; 1212 lines in Pearl; 12 in Cleanness as the most important number in the description of the New Jerusalem; again in Pearl, the procession of virgins (12 X 12 + 144 X 1000 ["round" number] + 144,000); stanza 72 in Group XV (multiple of 12 juxtaposed to multiple of 5) also is the sixth stanza in the group (half of 12), and the total number of lines in XV is half of 144 (Bishop 28-29).

Although the Beowulf poet was aware of the significance of numbers, he would probably have staggered away from even this brief glimpse of the structural resources of his 14th century counterpart. But he would perhaps have been nearly as overwhelmed by the development of formal argument as a resource for interior structure. First, there

[1]Note: All line numbers are from the Andrew and Waldron Text.

is the exclamatio, which introduces the propositio. Pearl begins with the propositio that a flawless pearl has been lost by a man who knows its supreme value and that the man is wounded by longing (luf-daungere) for this jewel so perfect that a Prynce would take pleasure in setting it in gold. Loss, perfection, and the Prince all predict the propositio in the exclamatio--"Allas!" (Pearl 1.8), and the logical development of the poem is also accurately predicted, leading the reader to form his own "sentence." As Kean points out, Chaucer's Parlement of Foules and Guillaume de Lorris' Roman de la Rose likewise begin with a "sentence" or sententia--a general statement of universal truth (Kean 8-9). This "sentence" is divided into three parts, hierarchically arranged: 1. the letter or grammatical structure, which turns into the 2. sense or obvious meaning, which leads to 3. the sentence or doctrinal content, "furnishing allegorical and tropological values to the reader" (Robertson 25). With a spinning head, the Beowulf poet might have seen the long line of the Latin terms which gave the Middle English poets "access to learned traditions of rhetorical figuration" (Pearsall 166). The exordium, designed to put the reader in the right frame of mind--to start his mind working along the desired lines; the topos --subject of a discourse, matter, or theme; the amplificatio--amplification by the process of suspension (Pearl

11.241 ff); the descriptio--designed, as was all Middle English description, to show an object as either good or bad (Pearl 11.3-4 and 5-8); the expolitio--a repetition of the same idea in different terms (Pearl 11.7-8); the circumlocutio--the identifying of an object or subject by another name (Pearl 11.13-16: þat wele); the exemplum- a parable, cautionary tale, or anecdote (Clean. 11.51ff: the wedding feast; Pearl 11.497ff: the laborers in the vineyard) --these are only the meagerest indication of the framework upon which the poet could build his structure (Kean 8-11). Much of Pearl is taken up with the disputio or debate between the Maiden and the Dreamer. Even here, there are structural elements: the rigid outline of the 14th-century sermon mandated the thema at the beginning, with the sermon branching out into "digressions, distinctions, and correspondences" (Bishop 35). But the debate is divided into two parts: Part One (11. 588-696) with a transitional passage (11.697-744) (Bishop 34). The thema is attached to the structural center of the poem at the end of the first part (11.729ff), where the only direct reference is made to the Pearl of Great Price and to Jesus' words that no one should enter the Kingdom of God except he became as a little child (Bishop 34-35). At the end of the debate comes the consolatio, the primary purpose of Pearl, as hinted first in the propositio; indeed, according to Bishop, all the "doctrinal

material . . . is directed toward its main purpose of consolation" (Bishop 26). As a final structural cap, the last line of Pearl repeats the idea of the first, expressing the idealized flawless pearl as the object of the Prynce's pleasure. On this hangs the full consolation of the Dreamer/Jeweler/Father as he accepts the Will of God.

There is no way of being certain what the Beowulf poet's state of mind might have been at this point, but it seems safe to say that he might have been shocked and repelled by the vividness of description in the literature of of the 14th century. On the other hand, he may have felt his nerves loosen and his heart beat faster as new ways of seeing color and perceiving shapes and sounds and human characteristics flooded in upon him. His limited pallet of colors would have seemed to fade into the grim scenes he had known, and his hue-blind eyes (Lerner 159-60) were opened upon a world of color and texture which had actually existed, as we see it in the colorful artifacts he left behind, but for which he had no words. The nearest he came to particularized description was in the doleful picture of the mere (Klaeber Beowulf 11.1357-76). But Middle Englsh poets were describing gardens and castles--especially that of the Green Knight (Green Knight 11.764-802)--and clothing, and furnishings--no more faceless warriors, a king represented merely by gray hair, anonymous mead-benches. The

single glint of gold from Hereot's roof was replaced by views of the Green Knight's castle from several angles and distances. First, there was the whole mass; then the eyes were allowed to travel up to the ramparts, then in to the various buildings inside the walls, and finally to a summing-up of the whole "in which the first confused glimpse 'As hit schemered and schon purȝ þe schyre okeȝ,' resolves itself into a sharply etched design [in silhouette] which stands out against the sky as if 'pared out of papure'" (Gawain 11.764-802). In Pearl, the Dreamer sees first the gems in the foundatioin of the New Jerusalem--green, white, purple streaked with blue (Pearl 11.1017-20); blwe (11.423-4) now describes the sky, which in Old English was either shining or dark, were it noticed at all; broun (l. 879) is now apparently the modern concept of "brown," but it also denotes a "dusky" quality; gold(e) or red-golde (l. 1110 and passim) has now a specific quality beyond "shining" or "beaten"; grene (l. 1005) is applied to something other than grass and leaves--the emerald; quyt (l. 1005) is, according to Kean, either "white" or something approaching opalescent--the most desired quality in the beryl (Kean 163-215 passim). In Gawain, also, there is a rich pallet, including much green and gold, but also schyr goulez (1.619) "pure heraldric red" and in the next line, pure golde hwez, implying a variety of

shades; and finally, tuly and tars (l. 858) seem to have denoted respectively "rich red" from a fabric produced in Toulouse) and "purple" (from Tarsus, where fabric had for centuries been dyed that color). There is also a riot of embroidery and gold-thread designs on drapery hems and flowing garments of sheer silk. Significantly, the vocabulary of clothing and armor is heavily larded with French terms, to such an extent that the Beowulf poet would have needed an interpreter (Turville-Petre 72).

However, though color might have seemed exotic to our poet, one major development in Middle English poetry would not have required more than a brief explanation of what changes time had wrought upon the alliterative long line. The patterns with which the Beowulf poet was familiar were the five listed by Oakden as those occurring often enough to be considered bona fide patterns:

A.	/x/x	(/xx/x)	Rising
B.	x/x/	(xx/x/)	Falling
C.	x//x	(xxx//x)	Clashing
D.	// x	(//x)	
E.	/ x/	(/ xx/)	

(Oakden 131)

One other variation of the alliterative pattern, found most notably in The Battle of Maldon, was double alliteration (aa|bb). As far as the make-up of these patterns are con-

cerned, there was both vocalic (15.48% of the lines in Beowulf have this type) and consonantal alliteration; of the latter, these sounds alliterate only with themselves, although s may alliterate with st; b, with br, etc. In Middle English, on the other hand, Types A and B are common and C has also survived (Oakden 157), but the character of alliteration shows considerable change: the last unalliterated syllable may set the alliteration for the next line (Oakden 148)--true in 5% of lines in Patience, 4.3% in Cleanness, 5.5% in Gawain--and alliteration is identical in two or more consecutive lines: in Gawain, 100 twos and seven threes (Oakden 155); in fact, twos, threes, and even fours were continually used and even extended (Oakden 157). By the 14th century, vocallic alliteration was no longer on different vowels but on identical ones (Oakden 158) and was in general "becoming ornamental, and applealing to the eye as well as to the ear"(Oakden 159). In Gawain, the reader finds such alliterative patterns as "Bólde brédden perínne" (1.21) and "Smál séndal besídes" (1.76)--half-lines with three stresses (Oakden 167, 172, 173). In Old English, alliteration was the structural element which linked the "freely-running half-lines in couples," but in Middle English, the half-lines are held together by more-or-less natural speaking accent in an end-stopped line, making alliteration progressively less crucial to the unity of

the line (Pearsall 160). Although the line was not divided across the phrase-group in Old English and enjambment was frequent (Oakden 132), in Middle English the enjambment was dropped in favor of end-rhymes (Oakden 158).

At this point, the Beowulf poet may well have thrown up his hands in despair--the manipulation of alliteration plus end-rhyme, not just in couplets, which was difficult enough, but in other complex patterns, was too much. In Old English, rhyme was rare: of eighteen examples in Beowulf, only five serve to link two lines together (Oakden 132). A reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight might have been a good starting point for the Beowulf poet's tentative introduction to this new development. The "bob" and "wheel" following a stanza of unrhymed alliterative poetry "would seem to suggest that the two schools [rhymed and alliterative unrhymed] of alliterative poetry were antagonistic, and that this poem represented an attempt to effect a compromise" (Oakden 218). In rhymed alliterative stanzas, the commonest pattern was twelve or thirteen lines, divided into eight lines with four stressed syllables, rhymning alternately, followed by a "bob" and then a "wheel"--a quatrain, its first line rhyming with the last line of the first eight. In this development, the tendency was to alliterate all four stressed syllables and even to have additional alliteration of unstressed syllables (vocallic or conso-

nantal) that was purely ornamental. Other patterns have fewer alliterative syllables--a a | b b, not "spanning" the half-line. Now that rhyme falls on the final syllable or syllables, the former feeling that the last syllable should not be alliterated was destroyed (Turville-Petre 62). In Pearl, with its pattern of abababababcbc, stanzas of great emotional intensity or richly detailed description exhibited alliteration on all four stressed syllables; with less emotional and more argumentative content, the stanza included less alliteration (Turville-Petre 66). Turville-Petre further cites The Poet's Repentance, from Harley's Lyrics, with its 12-line stanza, variety of rhyme-schemes, heavy alliteration, and stanza-linking concatenation. The poems of the Vernon manuscript were all regularly iambic, displayed "ornamental alliteration" at intense moments, and in addition to various rhyme-patterns, included concatenation in a number of examples (Turville-Petre 67).

With the increase in rhyming and its demands upon the language came an explosion of vocabulary. Turville-Petre speaks admiringly of the "resourcefulness of alliterative poets [of the Revival] and their readiness to embrace words from every conceivable environment . . . [often] used in meanings that have been extended beyond their ordinary use." From chese the way "choose the way," the poet extracts chese, which now means "to go" (Turville-Petre 80); he em-

ploys one part of speech for another: from Gawain, gentyl, hende, noble, semly, and wlonk all translate "man"; the doublet (two complimentary or contrasting words of the same grammatical class) give the poet more control over his line and rhyme: lytill and mykyll, olde and yonge, gladd and blythe, lysten and lythe--and especially in Chaucer: holt and heeth, leef nor looth, wepe and waille (Turville-Petre 81 and 84). Words were now borrowed from French--not only common words, but also technical terms to describe clothing and armor, hawking, feasting, hunting, and architecture (Turville-Petre 72-73). From Old Norse, the Pearl poet borrowed words to invoke the bleak, harsh landscape of the North and in doing so, struck off a line which would have delighted his predecessor: Þe skwes of þe scowtes skayned him þozt "The clouds seemed to him to be grazed by the jutting rocks" (Gawain 1.2167); from the Celts, he borrowed torrez "rocky peaks" (Pearl 1.875), though Andrew and Waldron have a quarrel with that translation (Turville-Petre 76-77). There also grew up a body of "poetic words," those confined entirely to poetry, for example, synonyms for "man," which included such non-alliterative but "poetic" hold-overs from Old English as berne, freke, and gome (found in all the Pearl poems) and synonyms to express movement: bowe, cayre, chese to, fare, ferke, faunde, glyde, raike, schake, sech to, strake, strike, tryne, wade, wawa, wende, and win (Oakden 183). Sometimes, the Middle English poet seems to cheat a

bit, using "idealizing epithets and adverbs"--clene is used five times in twenty lines in Gawain and almost uncountable times in Cleanness; and he inserts almost untranslatable phrases--sleȝte of þewes "skilful display of good manners" (Gawain 916), menskly hym keped "courteously awaited him" (Gawain 1312), and unlace þis bor "cut up this pig" (Gawain 1606), which mainly helped the poet work out his difficult line (Pearsall 162). Descriptive adjectives had proliferated and were sometimes used as substantives: especially fre, frely, frelich, hende, lele, schene, and wale; borlich could also mean "massive" (Gawain 1.766, 2225 and Cleanness 1488) or "the burly one." Poetic nouns abounded : bale "calamity"; blwue "blue" or "hue": erde, also wone "dwelling"; lere "face"; caple and coursour "horse"; may "maiden" (Oakden 185). Words in Middle English also had many "strands of metaphor" or translatio continuato: jeweler introduces "mercantile metaphors"--cofer, which could also mean "bank"; kyste, as in "treasure chest"; from paye, the "unprofitability" of striving against the will of God--it does not "pay"; counterfete; pennye, also pené "wages." The parable of the vineyard yields hyne "servants"; paye "wages"; and as an extra fillip, pay(e) as "profit" (Bishop 76 and 78).

Another specialized use of individual words is found in the punning of the concatenatio used to link groups of stanzas in Pearl and in other works. There are the words spot "flaw" or "place"; adubbment "individual adornment" or "universal

splendor"(Pearl 72-121); pyȝt "place" or "dress" (Pearl 193-241); and the play upon jewel/jeweler--all as examples of concatenation Even as the "literate" Beowulf poet (Niles 502) may have felt some sure footing here, he could well have been swept away again by other matters: "nominal compounds," like helledogges "hell-hounds," brenwaterys "a smith," brihtblickende "shining brightly," or cwalmhus "torture house" (Oakden II, 113-14). His dependable kennings are gone, but now there are "separable" and "inseparable" compounds and "cognate agent-nouns": draw up, lay out, run over, understand, and withdraw, among verbs; passerby, bystander, onlooker, insight, and thoroughfare as nouns (Bennett and Smithers xxix). Then there were ænigma, later known as conceits, such as the pearl which is both itself and a seed, because of its association with the spice, gromylyoun: the MED quotes from two herbals that this plant has a seed like a pearl--hard, white, and oval (Pearl 1.43); the lapidary formula, which integrates the Father/Dreamer in rejoicing that his pearl is in the possession of a prynce, where it should be (Pearl 11.1201-12); and the pearl in its proper setting, gold, which cannot be changed by melting, symbolizing the eternal, unchanging quality of the New Jerusalem and its Prynce (Pearl 11.1-2 and 1201)(Bishop 80, 83,and 87). And all these devices do not even begin to touch upon the rich imagery which brought alive the scenes

in all their particularized variety. The poor Beowulf poet might have been forgiven for blurting out:

> Þu nart noȝt to non oper thinge
> Bute þu canst of chateringe!
>
> (Bennett and Smithers 14)

Speaking of imagery and its attendant symbols, Bishop says that, as an interpreter of Pearl, he starts by unravelling [raveling?] "the various strands of allegory and symbolism that are woven into the poem's intricate texture," making, as he says, Dante's distinction between the allegory [and symbols] of theologians and that [those] of poets (Bishop 49). Triggered by imagery, symbols and allegorical elements burst upon the student of such matters with the impact of fireworks upon the senses. The garden--or the Garden--is the supreme image of medieval literature, standing as it does for a multitude of allegorical meanings. In D.W. Robertson, Jr.'s "The Doctrine of Charity in Medieval Literary Gardens," there are two categories: the good garden with its unfading flowers, leaves, and fruit, and its birds that sing the canticum novum of Psalms 33.3. The various elements, as Robertson points out, may be arranged to suit the individual author, but trees, wells, pools, streams, and even light, are all imbued with the spirit of Celestial Charity, or pure, disinterested love (Robertson 35). Wells and streams are "good," unless a willow is planted by them;

in such a case, the willow, a sterile tree, is the symbol of female beauty, but it bears no fruit and hides the water beneath it from the light of God. A rock with a stream flowing from it is associated with the Water of Life that flows in four streams from the Tree of Life, and a complex of symbols also emanates from it: "baptism, wisdom, true doctrine, Christus irrigans, Charity, or Holy Spirit" (Robertson 31). The lily and the rose represent purity and martyrdom, charity and innocence; but the rose alone may, on the side of cupiditas "sexual or selfish love," be the symbol of lechery or idolotry (Robertson 29). The evil garden may be one of two kinds: the attractive evil garden in Bede's De dei judicii, basis for the poem "Doomsday" (Robertson 34) and the "garden" of ghostly gloom in Beowulf. The former is beautiful, as Bede describes it, but the storm of God's wrath will destroy the trees and flowers, however fair, because they are sprung up out of cupiditas (Robertson 34). The "garden" in Beowulf has trees, rocks, and streams, but it is purely evil: the trees there, hung with hoar-frost and rooted in dark waters--both traditional symbols of Satan--hide the water and muddy banks beneath them from the light of God's day; the stream plunges underground; the pool is the dwelling-place of monsters and giants of the race of Cain; even the animals will not enter it to escape their death--certainly no birds sing; and

what illumination there is seems to be a sort of black light (Robertson 33). Then, the proof of the power of evil which has held the mere in an impious enchantment, the light of "God's candle" floods in as Beowulf kills Grendel's dam.

> Līxte se lēoma leoht inne stōd
> efne swā of hefene hādre scīneð
> rodores candel.
>
> (Klaeber 11.1570ff)

So from the early Middle Ages to the second half of the 14th century, poets and literary men of all types were attempting to "share the primary aim of Scripture, to promote Charity and condemn its opposite, cupidity" (Robertson 25); but only in the later part of the period is there evidence of their desire to engage the senses as well as the mind in the achieving of their aim. One other example of this endeavor is the importance of the sense of smell in Pearl. The Jeweler notes: "A fayre reflaye ȝet fro hit flot,/ . . . Suche odour to my herneȝ schot" (Pearl 11.46 and 58), and "So frech flauoreȝ of fryteȝ were,/As food hit me fayre refete" (Pearl 87-88). The scent of spices, sprung from the lost pearl, causes the Jeweler/Father to fall into a deep sleep (Pearl 11.55-60), not merely for the sake of recording the power of the sensory experience, but to prepare the scene of the vision. Such visions, or "dreams," were standard devices in times more ancient than that in Pearl;

they had been classified by Macrobius in his In somnius scipionis (I, iii), as the somnium, or "deep sleep dream," which provided meaning only allegorically; the visio, or "vision," which gave true information about future events; and the oraculum, a dream in which a "parent or other grave person" tells the dreamer what will happen, what to do about it, and what to avoid doing. In Pearl, there is the sweuen, (1.62), which equates the somnium; and the avysyoun, equivalent to the visio. At this point, Kean says flatly that Pearl does not make use of the oraculum (Kean 28), but it is difficult to accept that judgment in the light of the exhortations, advice, and admonishments of that "holy and grave person," the precious Pearl herself.

If particularized images had become familiar to both poets and audience, similes could not be far behind. The Beowulf poet's imagination might have been stimulated pleasantly by a reading of Laȝamon's Brut, especially in the lines where Childric is hunted down "like a fox pursued by the hounds"(Vol II, 445ff, quoted by Oakden from H.C. Wyld, A History of Modern Colloquial English: Oakden 399-400), and also by another passage in the same work: "Arthur seeing his dead knights lying like great steel fish below the waters of the stream, their scales gleaming as it were gold-plated shields and their fins afloat, as it were spears"(Vol II,471-72). These dealt with things the poet

himself knew well. But just possibly his serious, world-weary face (if such it were) could have relaxed into a smile at Oakden's translation of the old charm, Wenne Wenne Winchichenne:

> Shrivel as a coal upon the hearth,
> Shrink as the dirt in the stream
> And dwindle even as water in a pail.
> May you become as little as a linseed grain
> And much smaller, likewise,
> Than a handworm's hip-bone. (Oakden 399)

Surely, it is a kind, a merciful thing to leave him at a moment when he can forget the culture-shock his return has delivered to his nerves.

At least, he goes back to his mists and fens with one great satisfaction: however strange it may have become in some respects," . . . the native rhythmical 4-stress line, the basic strength of the alliterative continuum, retains its fundamental character unimpaired"; and if he could have looked even farther into the future, he would have seen that "The cadences and phrases of the native 4-stress line flood back into the verse of Chaucer's [immediate] successors, playing havoc with his [Chaucer's] finely turned but exotic pentameters" (Pearsall 184). The "wit and brillance of the French" (Oakden II, 87) had made their mark upon the language and its literature, but the line was English still.

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